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ABSTRACT

Consisting of both a theoretical and practical component, this paper describes the development of the educational kit, "This is Me," a Dutch program to prevent the development of prejudice in young children. Part 1 of the report describes the development of prejudice in children, the situation in Netherland schools, cultural diversity, the relationship between home and school, and program goals. Part 2 describes the contents of the kit as including 8 picture books (4 lap books and 4 look-and-listen books with cassette tapes), a video tape, stories for puppet shows, and an instruction book. The stories are about 20 children from the Netherlands, varying in ethnic, family, gender, and socioeconomic characteristics. Photographs of the children accompany the stories and can be displayed in classrooms. The videotape contains three 10-minute episodes about the daily rituals of waking up, after school, and bedtime. This section of the report describes the program component, makes recommendations for its use, and suggests modifications to meet the needs of particular groups. Following the description of the program components, the report discusses the dilemmas and choices in developing the kit, including the individualistic nature of Dutch culture and the use of materials in mono-ethnic schools. The report also describes the materials development, including locating professional authors and photographers with the same ethnic backgrounds as the characters and the results of testing the stories in various types of schools. (Author/KB)

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Working papers in
Early Childhood Development

Els Schellekens

This is me: in search of your own story

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Bernard van Leer Foundation

About the Anne Frank House

The Anne Frank House manages 'Het Achterhuis', the house where the Jewish girl Anne Frank went into hiding during World War II, and where she wrote her famous diary. Anne Frank was one of the millions of victims of the Nazis during the war, dying in the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. The Anne Frank House was established in 1957 to preserve Het Achterhuis, which has became a museum.

Apart from its work with Het Achterhuis, the Anne Frank House also develops international materials and educational materials concerning the Holocaust, anti-Semitism and racism. The Department of Intercultural Development focuses on how we can best fight discrimination in modern society – or, better still, how we can prevent it. To that end, the Anne Frank House publishes, among other things, educational materials for young people which are geared towards the promotion of equality within a multi-ethnic society.

This paper looks at the development of the educational kit *This is me*. It describes the ideas behind the material, and the choices and difficulties that had to be dealt with during the development process. We hope that this peek behind the scenes offers inspiration for everyone who works with young children in an intercultural approach.

About the author

Els Schellekens was born in 1949 and studied Dutch language and literature. She taught in a pedagogical academy for ten years, working with early childhood workers and teachers. She became interested in issues surrounding ethnic diversity as a part of the school curriculum during annual theme weeks on 'intercultural education'. She worked as a freelancer on several learning packs. She has worked in the Department of Intercultural Development at the Anne Frank House since 1990.

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This is me: in search of your own story

Bernard van Leer Foundation, *August 1998*

INTRODUCTION

The Anne Frank House and intercultural education

The Anne Frank House has a long tradition in developing educational materials and exhibits concerning World War II, the Holocaust and anti-Semitism. But it also focuses on modern-day society. For, if what we have learned from the past is that 'this must never happen again', then we cannot avoid the question of how we can best fight discrimination in the present – or, better yet, how we can prevent it.

In the mid 1980s, the Anne Frank House, inspired by the English study group ACER (Afro-Caribbean Education Resource Centre) decided upon a new experience-oriented, positive approach. The materials it developed show that ethnic diversity is natural, and that there is space for one's own identity and a positive self-image. By particularly emphasising the similarities among children, mutual acceptance and respect for each other can grow.

In 1990, *Here we are* for 10 to 12 year old children was published. This kit is centred around stories about everyday life in the Netherlands for children of various ethnic backgrounds. The emphasis lies on bringing out the strong points of each individual student. By doing this, a stimulating educational atmosphere is created and prejudices and inflexible images concerning ethnic groups are challenged. A German version, *Das Sind Wir* (1995) was created in cooperation with German educators.

This is me (1995, aimed at four to six year olds) continued along the same lines.

Reading guide

This publication consists of two components: a theoretical component and a practical one. The theoretical information appears on pages 4 to 14. Here we describe a few insights which determine the direction we are taking. The first texts provide background information on the situation in the Netherlands.

Those wishing to read only the practical component can start on page 15, where the kit is introduced. The section 'From idea to product' contains a report of the developmental process. For those interested in creating similar material, we have pointed out the dilemmas and formulated recommendations. Finally, attention is given to the implementation of *This is me*.

This is me is the result of three years of intensive work. For the two developers it was a hectic but an inspiring period. Project leader Els Schellekens (Dutch background) works as an educator at the Anne Frank House, Department of Intercultural Development. In keeping with the content of *This is me*, a multiethnic team was chosen. Rika Echteld, remedial educationalist with a Surinamese background, was appointed for two years as project co-worker. From her personal experience, Rika could take a critical look at the ethnic diversity in the classroom situation and at what intercultural activities can mean for immigrant children and their parents. She was especially alert in spotting undesirable group-images and stereotypes.

Immigration in the Netherlands

Since World War II, most immigrants who settled in the Netherlands came from the countries around the Mediterranean Sea and the former Dutch colonies: Indonesia; Surinam; and the Royal Provinces of the Dutch Antilles and Aruba. Refugees and asylum seekers have also found a safe haven in the Netherlands. These immigrants, together with their descendants, make up about 10 per cent of the population. In Amsterdam, more than half of the school population has parents or grandparents who were born elsewhere in the world.

The immigrants of the 1950s and 1960s were actively recruited in Mediterranean countries because of a shortage of labour in industry. They were almost always men alone who wanted to earn money to start businesses in their native countries. When the worldwide economic situation worsened, many of them decided, after a number of years, to bring their families over. However, until the end of the 1970s, the policy of the Dutch government was based on the premiss that the 'guest labourers' would – at some point – return to their country of origin. When this idea was finally discarded, the new policy motto became 'integration without loss of culture'.

A changing society

Until the 1980s, there was a taboo on blatant racism. The Netherlands has its international reputation as a tolerant society to thank for this. However, during the 1990s, the situation slowly changed. One regularly heard – even from corners that one would not have suspected – such slogans as: 'Holland is full!', 'Islam is a threat to our democracy', 'the immigrants are not integrating', and 'the government is coddling foreigners at the expense of its own people'.

Social scientists see in xenophobia primarily a diversionary tactic for developments which are experienced as threatening: the breakdown of social security and family structures which give way to individualism and unemployment. Extremist parties play on these feelings of fear and insecurity. In 1994, in cities where they stood for elections extremist parties won an average of 7.4 per cent of the votes. As of 1998, the tide seems to have turned: the extremists won only two seats in city councils and not a single representative in Parliament.

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Developments in intercultural education

Intercultural education came into fashion towards the end of the 1970s. Since 1985, elementary schools are required by law to take into account the fact that children are being raised in a multicultural society. It is up to the schools themselves to determine how they deal with this.

At first, the emphasis was placed on the cultures of the various countries of origin. Teachers organised attractive projects with a folkloric tint to them. Whole classes drank mint tea out of tiny glasses and ate exotic snacks.

For the teachers and the Dutch children, the 'intercultural' element was often surprising and exciting. The immigrant parents also felt that their contribution was appreciated. Culturally sensitive teachers, however, had their doubts about this focus on the exotic among the immigrant groups, especially because it seemed as though the Dutch had no culture of their own. Moreover, the children often had little to say about various aspects of 'their' culture, religion, celebrations, life in the country of origin of their parents.

Along with the 'culture projects' many elementary schools also worked with material about 'being different'. This was an endeavour to prevent prejudice, primarily among white children. For the most part indirectly, the message was presented that everyone is equally valuable, and that living together peacefully is better than hard words and fighting.

An increasing number of teachers now feels the need for an integrated approach. However, the standard education offered is a long way from being completely intercultural. That is why additional material is still needed.

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THE INSPIRATIONAL SOURCE OF *THIS IS ME*

This is me stimulates educators to do justice to the multiethnic society. Its experience-oriented approach offers them the possibility of recognising and using the skills, knowledge and experiences that the children bring to their classes from their daily lives. The diversity of the backgrounds broadens the outlook of both the children and the teachers.

When devising and developing the material, we drew on several scientific and educational insights. In this section we will explain a few of our basic ideas.

Young children do not discriminate, do they?

'Is intercultural education for four to six year olds really necessary? They do not even know how to discriminate.' This question is asked by many teachers, who notice that young children have not yet developed any prejudices and are, indeed, open to each other. When children tease each other because of their skin colour, it does not necessarily mean that they are prejudiced – they have simply discovered that skin colour 'works' as a subject for teasing.

The developmental psychologist, Piaget, would have agreed with this. He postulated that children between four and seven years old are egocentric and still unaware of national and ethnic groups. They assume that other people see the same things and have the same feelings that they do[1]. However, children do notice differences in appearance and language: it is simply a question of looking and listening.

Children are vulnerable

The simple observation of differences does not necessarily lead to prejudice, maintains Aboud[2]. Non-prejudiced children see the same differences as prejudiced children but do not react negatively to them. Between the ages of four and seven, most children recognise members of their own ethnic group as 'the same'. However, if they are asked to choose a preference, many three to six year olds choose a child from a different ethnic group. Children who know which ethnic group they belong to do not automatically have negative feelings about other groups. It is, however, true that children of colour choose white children slightly more often than white children choose them.

The first signs of ethnic awareness matching the value put on ethnic characteristics in the child's immediate environment, begin to develop by three years of age. Less important than the differences themselves is the meaning that is attached to them. As young as they are,

1 Kuyper D. (1996) Interculturele sociale vaardigheden op de basisschool. Utrecht

2 Aboud F. (1988) Children and prejudice. Oxford/Cambridge

children still pick up all sorts of social signals. They are, in the words of Derman-Sparks, 'aware very young that colour, language, gender and physical ability differences are connected with privilege and power. They learn by observing the differences and similarities among people and by absorbing the spoken and unspoken messages about those differences. Racism, sexism and handicappism have a profound influence on their developing sense of self and others'[3]. That is why, she states, 'early childhood workers have a serious responsibility to find ways to prevent and counter the damage before it becomes too deep. If children are to grow up with the attitudes, knowledge and skills necessary for effective living in a complex, diverse world, early childhood programmes must actively challenge the impact of bias on children's development'. The development of an unladen ethnic consciousness and a positive self-image, therefore demands careful handling and effort by the school. *This is me* brings physical and cultural characteristics to the attention of children in a natural, non-stereotyped manner.

3 Derman Sparks (1991) *Anti-bias curriculum: tools for empowering your children*, Washington

The seeds of prejudice

Prejudice, racism, stereotyping and discrimination are complicated concepts. In daily use, they are confused with each other.

Stereotypes are generalisations, labels that are pasted onto groups of people. They help to organise the world by providing a simplified version of reality. Everyone uses stereotypes because nobody can know everything about everyone. The negative side of this is that stereotyping compartmentalises people in advance.

When someone tenaciously clamps onto negative stereotypes of certain groups, we speak of a prejudice which can strongly influence the attitude and expectations towards those groups. As is the case with stereotyping, there is a lack of knowledge. However, emotions also play an important role in prejudice; that is why they are difficult to refute. Prejudices also have a social function. They are generally not personal thoughts, but ideas which live within a group. People who express their prejudices, do so in order to make it clear which group they want to belong to and to set themselves apart from others. Prejudices are generally an expression of ignorance, combined with a feeling of powerlessness and fear.

One speaks of racism when one ethnic group supposes itself superior to other groups. Racist organisations try to gain political advantage from popular prejudices. In other words, their goal is to turn prejudice and fear of 'strangers' into xenophobia.

Stereotyping, prejudice and racism are expressions of attitude. Discrimination deals with acts: placing groups or individuals at a disadvantage on the grounds of characteristics which are not relevant. Often, the unequal treatment is based on prejudice and stereotyping; it is not always based on racism[4].

4 Tanja (1997) *Vooroordelen verklaren*, Anne Frank House, Amsterdam

Once prejudice takes root it is difficult to reverse. That is why prevention is so important, especially when one is dealing with groups that are in a vulnerable position in society.

In schools in the Netherlands few teachers consciously express prejudice or discriminate towards ethnic minorities. If children do, most teachers blame the origins of their negative attitude on the parents. However, many teachers, and a good deal of educational material, unconsciously assume the superiority of the dominant culture. This can be a breeding ground for stereotyping and prejudice.

Children quickly notice, for example, if the teachers appreciate a certain style of social interaction which does not always coincide with what all of the children learn at home. For

children who have learned this style of interaction at home, a feeling of superiority can creep into their development unnoticed, while children with a different style can develop the feeling that they are inferior in some way.

This can lead for example, to the following. Ten year old Jakob says to a researcher with a Dutch background that name-calling often ends up in a fight. 'Especially with Ali, that's a foreigner who always calls me a dirty bastard'.[5] Jakob whitewashes his own behaviour by placing Ali in the category 'foreigners'.

To prevent this kind of labelling, all students should develop a positive self-image. An atmosphere of mutual acceptance and respect is a condition for education. The focus is on the potential of individual students – their strengths, characters and intellectual curiosity. That paves the way for the development of understanding and for the appreciation of diversity and a tolerant attitude. Key opportunities to influence students' attitudes and behaviour exist in schools. We cannot start young enough.

5 Waal M. de (1997) 'Het belangrijke verschil tussen plagen en pesten', in *De Volkskrant*, 30 April 1997

Photo: Roy Tjin

We are all normal

Children hate to be different from the group. That is the conclusion of, among others, Pels[6] in her research on the cultural wealth of pre-school children of Moroccan descent in the Netherlands. These children are more oriented towards parents, teachers and peers than towards themselves. At schools with few children of non-Dutch origin, it is generally the teachers who confront these Moroccan children with their culture. This conflicts with their desire to be 'normal' and causes them to crawl into their shells or to act in a provocative manner, as did Shadid (from an Islamic family) who answered the question 'What are you having for dinner today?' with: 'Me? Pork'.

6 Pels T. (1991) *Marokkaanse kleuters en hun culturele kapitaal*. Amsterdam/Lisse

In multiethnic classes, where children are not confronted with the fact that they are different, they often talked about their own backgrounds. It seems as though children have fewer problems living with a variety of cultures than with the fact that the environment labels them as 'different', especially when that is done in a more or less hidden, condemnatory manner. Pels feels that cultural differences in kindergarten classes should only be brought up in the context of the similarities. Kayser[7] also advocates focusing attention on the similarities. The recognition of commonality often offers insights into change and encourages positive interaction. Moreover, it is important for immigrant children to learn to deal with the differences. This strengthens their adaptability, cognitive flexibility and feeling of self-esteem. There is no 'culture course' necessary for this; when searching for similarities, the cultural elements appear by themselves.

7 Kayser D (1996) *Interculturele sociale vaardigheden op de basisschool.* Utrecht

8 Kayser D (1996) *Interculturele sociale vaardigheden op de basisschool.* Utrecht

Do you eat differently?

Denny Kayser, a child of Indonesian parents, remembers from his childhood that the parents of his Dutch playmates had a stereotyped picture of Indonesian families. "Of course you people only eat rice!" was often said, while my mother always cooked a wide variety of meals, from potatoes to spaghetti to sauerkraut. The most she did was to add some spices to the food in order to make it a bit hotter." Years later, it appears that Kayser's experience is still extremely relevant.

In a kindergarten, the children have cut and pasted cultural clothing from other countries from magazines. When they are finished, the teacher asks Anada, with an Indonesian background, "Do you eat differently at home?"

Anada: "No, just ordinary food."

Teacher: "But you eat rice a lot?"

Anada: "Yes."

A bit later, the teacher asks Meryl (with a Surinamese background), "Do you sometimes eat Surinamese at home?"

Meryl answers: "No."

Moreover, when Nardo, a boy with an Indian background, says that he likes potatoes, meat and rice, the teacher shows her surprise. These children think, of course, that the food they eat is absolutely normal, but they do notice that there is something the matter with it. Perhaps Tarek says that he likes potatoes on purpose because they are typically Dutch.

9 Cock, R de (1997) *Pas op de plaats: een stap vooruit.* research report on *This is me*, internal publication, Anne Frank House, Amsterdam

In the *This is me* kit, ethnic diversity is 'normal'. By choosing themes that are recognisable for all children, the similarities rise to the surface naturally without anyone feeling that she/he is seen as different. Because the children themselves tell what is important to them, stereotypes do not have a chance.

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From an ethnographic perspective, Shirley Brice Heath also emphasises the importance of demolishing the boundaries between the classroom and the community. In *Ways with words* she explains that children from the middle-classes, long before they go to school 'have made the transition from home to the larger societal institutions which share the values, skills and knowledge bases of the schools. Their eventual positions of power in the school and the workplace are predestined in the conceptual structure which they have learned at home and which are reinforced in school and numerous other associations.'[10] It is different for children of blue-collar workers. Only when schools encourage the exchange of cultural patterns and break through the dominance of the middle-class, can they tap the strengths in other groups. For, says Brice Heath in another paper, 'the culture children learn as they grow up is, in fact, "ways of taking" meaning from the environment around them.'[11] Stereotyped pictures and limited references make teachers blind to the children's actual knowledge, experiences and qualities.

10 Brice Heath S (1983) *Ways with words. Language, life and work in communities and classrooms*. Cambridge

11 Brice Heath S (1987) 'What no bedtime story means: narrative skills at home and school' in *Language and Society 11*. Cambridge

Yun's chopsticks

In response to a photograph about eating in China, the teacher asks Yun if he is also so smart that he can eat with chopsticks. Yun nods and averts his eyes. A few children look surprised and start to giggle. A week later, Ufuk has to say whether or not she can speak Turkish. 'A little bit,' whispers Ufuk, while they always speak Turkish at home. She is not eager to demonstrate this for the class.

The questions put to Yun and Ufuk place the spotlight on their ethnic cultural backgrounds which then become something 'special', while the teacher and the other children apparently eat and speak normally.

The feeling of being set apart disappears when the teacher – together with the children – finds out in how many languages they can say 'good morning'. Then, Ufuk glowingly adds her Turkish contribution to the list of greetings. She teaches the class how to pronounce it and, for a while, the children greet each other in a different language every day.

If the teacher were to ask all the children about their favourite foods, who cooks at home and how they eat, Yun might even talk about the chopsticks, that is, if he uses them, is proud of that fact and dares to say it. However, it is also all right if he keeps quiet or says that he eats with a knife and fork, just like the other children.

Young children look at the world in an unbiased way. This world grows – as children grow – at lightning speed. From the trusted family circle, a safe haven, the children explore new surroundings: at playmates' homes; at the crèche or pre-school; and at school. That is where

'real learning' starts: education that prepares the children to function as full-fledged citizens in a democratic society. Together with Vygotsky, we assume that learning is a social-cultural process. In order for this process to have an optimum effect, there must be a connection between the world the children live in and the school.

Being open for each other's stories decreases the distance between the teacher and the children with 'different' backgrounds so that they start to view and appreciate each other more as individuals. However, in order to be able to listen, teachers must first step aside and distance themselves from their own images, expectations and norms. That will take some effort, especially for members of the dominant group (which most teachers are). Those who do will be more careful in what they say and how they act, and will be able to free themselves from labelling people because of one aspect of their appearance.

Otherwise they could fall into traps such as the following one: out of fear of saying something wrong, adults' reactions to innocent questions asked out of curiosity, can be distorted such as in the example in the box below.

Embarrassed by the situation

One morning Rika visits a village school full of blind children. Before the class starts, five year old Ingrid asks her mother: 'Why is this lady so black?' Mother looks around nervously and asks shortly: 'Why are you so white?' Then she quickly leaves the classroom. The teacher seems not to have heard anything. However, Rika notices that more of the children are staring at her. When she invites the children to ask her anything they want to know, a lively discussion ensues. 'Are you brown all over, even under your clothes?', 'Were you born like that?' The children also feel her skin and try to see if the brown comes off on their fingers. After a few visits, the brown skin of the lady is not an object of interest any more, she is simply Miss Rika.

Negotiation about meaning

Education given from a one-sided cultural perspective gives children a too narrow view of the world. This applies not only to children who are given other values at home but also to those whose home culture differs little from the school culture.

According to the developmental psychologist Bruner, good education helps students see 'that many worlds are possible, that meaning and reality are created and not discovered, that negotiation is the art of constructing new meanings by which individuals can regulate their relations to each other'[12]. In this process of 'negotiation about meaning', the children and teachers exchange experiences, insights and knowledge. They learn about each other's backgrounds and frames of reference and can, therefore, estimate what it is that someone finds right, beautiful or reprehensible. Shared meanings arise from this. In order to reach common

12 Bruner J (1986) *Actual minds, possible worlds*. Harvard /Cambridge/ Massachusetts/London

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ground, the experiences of the children, their questions to the world, their moral values and their social norms must be openly discussed. When no connection can be found with their own meanings and their perspectives, the most vulnerable children risk becoming alienated from the school culture.

Negotiating about meaning demands open dialogue, in which all children feel valued and respected as individuals. This respect includes the 'cultural' knowledge they have received at home and on the streets.

All of this sounds splendid. However, it is anything but easy, especially when it concerns undesirable behaviour or when a child crosses the personal boundaries of the teacher. While one child will frown when angry, another will call the teacher a 'stupid bitch'. An angry face is easier for most teachers to handle than swear words. Nonetheless, language is also a question of personal experience: shouting abuse can be the way in which children see their family members show that they are truly angry. It is then the task for the teacher to put his or her own feelings aside and to react to the intention of the student which is to express anger. The commentary on the word usage can wait until a quieter moment when the teacher can explain her feelings: 'It makes me feel terrible when you call me a stupid bitch, it hurts me very much.' The student then learns that the same word has a different effect on the teacher than it does on parents or peers.

A similar situation can occur in the area of norms and values. A boy who says that an unmarried woman who lives with a man is a whore, must be told that the teacher thinks differently. By telling the child this, the teacher probably does not change the child's opinions, but the mutual boundaries become clear. That is always better than ignoring the values of the child by simply saying that he or she does not wish to hear a statement like that or by trying to convince the student that he is wrong. An unspoken conflict may then arise that can simmer for a long time and increase the distance between the student and the teacher.

The importance of friends

The teacher reads a story about friendship. When it is finished, she says to the four and five year old children: 'Friends are very important.' All the children nod, except for John.
John: 'But water is more important than friends because you can't live without water.'
Teacher: 'Yes, water is very important, but friends are, too.'
John: 'Well ...'
The teacher interrupts him: 'If you were all alone, you wouldn't have anyone to talk to.'
John: 'Yes I would, papa and mama.'
Teacher: 'No, because then you are not really alone.'
John: 'Yes, but ...'
The teacher distracts him by starting a song. She does not return to the subject.

The teacher steamrolls John's remarks because they do not fit into the theme that she wanted to discuss. It is no wonder that he bristles and becomes argumentative. If the teacher had introduced the conversation with a remark about how important friends are for her, she would have immediately focused the attention on the theme. Moreover, an opening question such as: 'Who has a friend who is important for you?' could have been an excellent opening question for this group discussion.

Sometimes the negotiations about meanings fail in everyday classroom situations. In the example on page 10, the teacher is too restricted by the lesson she intended to give.

Are my parents doing something wrong?

At school, children often notice what teachers expect from parents. The stories that are read aloud swarm with caring, middle-class parents who smile tenderly at their mischievous children. This is hardly recognisable for the children who normally get a good telling-off at home. Moreover, teachers make such remarks (out of sincere concern) as: 'ask your mother to put you in bed on time, or else you will fall asleep at school'; 'it is too warm for tights today, take them off'; 'tell your parents they really must come to the parents' evening this time'. According to the family psychologist Nagy[13], children experience these types of remarks as a direct attack on their parents. That makes them insecure because children are unconditionally loyal to their parents.

13 Nagy I (1990). Loyaliteit van kinderen aan ouders wint het van de school' in Trouw, 17 October 1990

The school that interferes with the child-rearing styles at home, or even drives a wedge between parent and child, can force the child to make a choice: turn away from the school and the society that school stands for; or become alienated from one's own parents, in an attempt to please the school. Thus, the child may lose one of the two essential sources of learning. Those who choose the school often discover during adolescence that the desired society actually has little to offer them. On the other hand, children whose parents are not respected by the school will make less of an effort to do well.

Fruitful teamwork between home and school can only occur when the teachers recognise that parents in principle, want the best for their children, even though their care and support might take different forms. It is then advisable for the school to exchange child-rearing strategies with the parents – for example, in the areas concerned with reward and punishment – and the teachers can explain their own methods and behaviour.

Increasing parent participation

An often-heard complaint is that parents do not show enough interest in the school. However, it is in the interest of the children that the teacher communicates with the parents. Contact

Photo: Ulla Kilian

with parents is relatively easy to initiate in informal chats before or after school. Children are generally pleased to see that their mother or father is talking to the teacher: it shows concern for their well-being.

This is me gives suggestions for chats about everyday subjects. Some of the stories supply a starting point for working together with the parents on themes such as: sleeping away from home for the first time; making a booklet with the child; or trying to overcome the fear of dogs. Of course, teachers with 30 children will not have the chance to engage in such exchanges with all the parents every week, but they can certainly do it for the children who need it the most.

Identity

Young people from families of ethnic minorities are regularly asked: 'do you feel more Dutch or more Surinamese/Moroccan/Turkish, etc.?' Saharso[14] reports that constantly dividing people into ethnic categories can give these children the idea that they will, for once and for all, be forced to choose which group they want to belong to. If they don't know which to choose, they may live between two cultures and may, in the long run, suffer from identity confusion.

14 Saharso S. (1995) 'De tweede generatie: (voor eeuwig) verloren tussen twee culturen?' in *Psychologie en Maatschappij* no. 32. 1995. Nijmegen

Saharso states, however, that identity is never one-dimensional. That is why she prefers to talk about life in or with two cultures. Every person is a member of more than one group and can display appropriate behaviour – that can vary with each situation – in each group, depending on the aspect of identity that is called upon. When regarded this way, it is clear that children of immigrants are searching for a synthesis of elements from several cultures. Saharso assumes that cultures do not exist outside of people, but are sustained by real people.

Stories of others make people conscious of their own identity. Children discover their identity when they investigate the world of others by immersing themselves in how others live, what is important for them and why they do what they do. They compare what they know and think, desire and feel, what their relationships with adults and peers mean to them and how they get along with others. *This is me* offers children role models of various ethnic backgrounds, so that recognition is possible for every child on several levels, regardless of ethnicity.

Vina is just like me!

In the class, the teacher reads the story about Vina – a girl with a Moluccan background – from *This is me*. After the story is over, Sharmila (of Surinamese-Indian descent) sighs: 'She is just like me!' When the teacher asks her if there are any differences between them, Sharmila answers: 'I don't have a T-shirt like that. Other than that, Vina is just like me.' The teacher, wisely, does not go into Vina's ethnic background. As far as Sharmila is concerned, it is not important. By coincidence, Vina's story fits her perfectly. Vina's brown skin can, of course, play a role in this. Sharmila rarely finds children in books who resemble her in colour.

Teaching young children

In the Netherlands, school is mandatory for all children from the age of five years old. In practice, however, 98 per cent of children start elementary school – an eight year programme – by the age of four. In most of the schools, children of four and five years are together in one class, combining Groups 1 and 2.

More and more kindergarten teachers in the Netherlands are proponents of 'developmentally oriented' education, a new movement in didactics. The idea is that the educational surroundings must challenge children to do things by themselves so that they broaden their experience and acquire knowledge and skills. This is most successful when teachers use themes and activities which are meaningful to the children [15]. Whether or not an activity is meaningful can be seen from the child's involvement, concentration and enjoyment. Themes are suitable when they are linked to the natural, social and cultural reality, in and out of school. This helps children to deal with everyday emotions, events and experiences, gives them insights into the reality of life around them and stimulates independent and competent thinking and acting in social situations which are relevant to them. Optimum development can occur when children are free of emotional hindrances, have self-confidence, possess a stable and healthy self-image and are curious, adventurous and exploring.

15 Janssen-Vos 1990 *Basisontwikkeling*. Assen/ Maastricht

This is me fits into the developmentally-oriented approach because of the choice of extra-curricular themes and the broad attention to experiences, emotions, social relationships and the strengths of each child.

Multilingualism

Language is indissolubly bound to culture, ethnicity and identity. At school, bilingualism among non-Dutch speaking children is often considered to be a problem because their language skills in Dutch are not as well-developed as that of their Dutch-speaking peers. There is the tendency to talk about a 'general' language deficiency while, in fact, the only problem is the command of the Dutch language. It is, indeed, difficult to work with children who do not yet know the language of the classroom. That is why teachers sometimes even encourage the parents to speak more Dutch at home with their children. However, it is absolutely essential for the relationship between children and their parents that the parents speak to the children in the language in which they can best express themselves. Moreover, bilingual development can also be seen as a cognitive advantage and as a part of the identity of the child.

Nowadays, progressive schools promote a language policy in which non-Dutch speaking children learn Dutch in a way that it is not at the expense of their own language. These schools use an intensive approach to bilingual education with instruction in the child's language and culture: a legally established right in the Netherlands. Relevant languages also feature in the lessons, and there are texts in various languages.

By casually giving various languages a place, *This is me* stimulates a positive attitude towards multilingualism. Every story always contains a few words in the home language of the main character. Thus, we find the word *Nene*, the Moluccan-Malay word for Grandma. Turkish children perk up immediately: *Nene* is also Grandma in Turkish. In a video episode, the children wish each other 'good night' in several languages. The main characters have all kept their real names; the pronunciation is given phonetically.

The goals of This is me

The above insights led us to choose the following pedagogical focus for the kit:

- Promoting an emphasis on social-emotional and personal development.

- Working towards a pleasant, safe and stimulating educational environment in the classroom in which the teachers and the children are receptive to each other.

To reach these goals we focused on the following aspects of identity and the group dynamic.

- **Promoting identification by offering recognition**
  In order to increase empathy and to stimulate curiosity, we chose realistic and varied visual materials. By exchanging experiences, adventures and emotions, the children discover similarities and differences among themselves. Effortlessly, the children learn that everyone has his or her own identity and his or her own home environment, character, feelings and style of behaviour.

- **Increasing self-confidence by emphasising everyone's strong points**
  Reflecting on one's own strengths and style forms the basis for a positive self-image and for self-confidence. This promotes not only academic achievement but also mutual respect – for people who have a positive self-image are less inclined to bring others down.

- **Fostering insight into feelings and behaviour and the effect this has on others**
  The themes of the stories make it easy for the children to talk about what concerns them. In this way, they explore their inner world and that of others. They find the right words for their feelings, enjoy the similarities and accept the differences without immediately rejecting 'being different'.

THE CONTENT OF *THIS IS ME*

In the following section we will describe the kit. In every section we have summarised our experiences in a number of recommendations and possible improvements.

Diversity as principle

At the centre of the kit are 20 children from the Netherlands: real children, each with his or her own experiences, personality, preferences and home environment. We have paid special attention to ethnic background, skin colour, gender, home and social-economic environment. The family situations vary as well: alongside 'complete' families, there are stories in which there is only a father or a mother. Aunts and grandparents play a more significant role than they would in the average family of Dutch origin.

Recommendations:

- Present the main characters realistically in every way, with their own first names.
- Offer a wide variety in many respects.
- Show physical and cultural characteristics without focusing attention on them.
- Consider carefully whether or not the cultural aspects affirm a stereotype.

Summary

This is me is comprised of 18 parts, bound with rubber bands in a cheerful pink folder. There

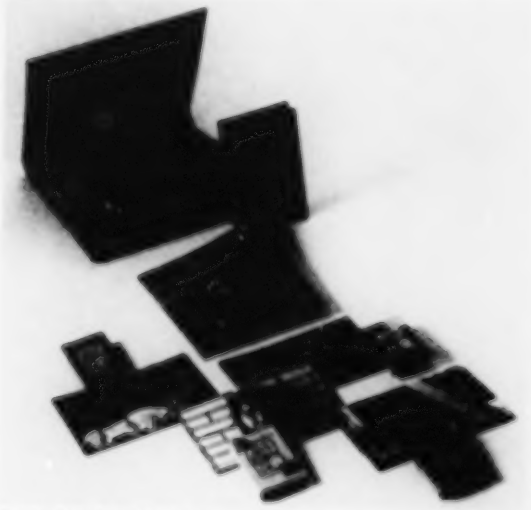

Photo AnneFrankStichting

are eight picture books (four lap books and four look-and-listen books with cassette tapes), a video tape, stories for puppet shows and an instruction book.

Lap book stories
Four of the books were designed so that the teachers can put them on their laps. Each of them are in a ring binder. The cover of the kit also doubles as a stand.

Every lap book story contains eight colour photographs (30 x 30 cm). The first photograph is a portrait of the main character. The page with text contains background information about the child. While the teacher reads the text aloud from the back of each photograph, the children look at the photographs on the front. When the story is finished, the photographs can be hung on the wall. That way, the main character stays in the classroom for a while and the children can look at the pictures again at their leisure.

Titles and themes
Jeroen goes shopping.
Jeroen wants to ride his bicycle on the street alone just like his older sister. But his mother won't let him.

Tin makes a surprise.
Tin draws and pastes a scrapbook for his babysitter all by himself.

Mahassine spends the night away from home.
As long as she has her teddy bear, Ayni, Mahassine is not really afraid to spend the night with her aunt and uncle.

Vina climbs a pole.
For the first time, and with the help of her friends, Vina climbs to the top of a climbing pole.

Photo: Roy Tjin

Vina in the classroom

Photo: Otto Tatipikalawan

The teacher has the lap book on her lap with the story 'Vina climbs a pole'. When describing Vina, the teacher tells the class that she is four years old. She likes to ride her bicycle and, together with her younger sister, to dress-up and use face paints. On the days that her mother works, she goes to her grandparents who live next door.

Then the story begins. A group of neighbourhood children, some of them even older than 10, pick up Vina and ride their bicycles to the neighbourhood playground. Because Vina is the smallest one in the group, she has to peddle very hard to keep up with the others. In the playground, the bigger children do tricks that Vina finds exciting but also a little scary. Then, one by one, they climb the climbing pole. At first, Vina does not dare try, but she lets herself be convinced by her friends. With their help, she climbs all the way to the top. Glowing with pride, she sits on top of the pole. Back at Grandma's and Grandpa's, Vina tells them what she has done. Grandpa says: *Dagof* ('good for you' in Molluccan-Malay) and Grandma massages Vina's feet.

While the teacher is reading, thirty little heads are bent forward to see the pictures better. The children empathise when Vina is too frightened to climb the pole and they utter cries of admiration at the picture of Vina grinning at the top.

Look-and-listen books with cassette tapes

Four other stories are published as look-and-listen books, each with eight photographs. The accompanying cassette tapes contain the text of the stories in two languages: Dutch and the mother tongue of the main character.

In the listening corner, the children can listen to the tapes with headphones; alone or in small groups. A musical fragment tells them when to turn the page.

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Rydell goes to the barber.
Because of his Grandma's *bigi-yari* (an important birthday), the barber shaves music notes in Rydell's hair. The text is also read in Sranan Tongo.

Nurdan helps the doves.
One day the dove's nest on the balcony is deserted. Nurdan makes new eggs from clay in the hope that the doves will come back. The text is also read in Turkish.

Santosh builds a boat.
Together with his sister and a group of neighbourhood children, Santosh builds a toy boat in the garden. The text is also read in Sarnami.

Taina makes a wish.
Two girlfriends come to Taina's to play. They make a wish at the magic stone. The text is also read in Portuguese.

Photo: Anne Frank Huis

Miss Cynthia reads Rydell's story to groups of four or five children. After the story is finished, the group can go play in the barber's corner. Nearly all of them do so, the boys as well as the girls. There are combs, ribbons, rubber bands and hair pins. With towels and a plant spray the children imitate their hairdressers.

Recommendations:

- Work with 'real' children, their own stories and photographs.
- Begin the stories with a picture portrait and a description of the main character in his or her environment, with the teachers choosing the information that is most relevant to the children.
- Choose themes which are more or less recognisable for all the children.
- Show, in words and pictures, the warm relationship between the main character and his or her family members.
- Casually use the language that the main character hears at home.
- Use the lap books for themes which best suit a roundtable discussion in larger groups.
- Put hooks on the backs of the large photographs so that they can be hung up on the wall of the classroom or in the hall.
- Make smaller books for individual use or for use in pairs.
- Record the stories in two languages on cassette tapes.
- Demonstrate variation in language by using the same reader on the Dutch side of the cassette tape as on the 'translated' side.
- Combine the look-and-listen stories with music from the environment of the main character played before and after the story.
- Use short fragments of music during the story to indicate when the children can turn the page.

Improvements:

- If there are four year olds in the group, shorten the stories and limit the photographs to no more than seven.
- Keep the number of characters in the story as low as possible.

Video: *Look, This is me*

Of all the components of the package, the video is the most realistic. The tape consists of three episodes of ten minutes each about daily rituals: *Waking up; After school;* and *Time for bed.* Each programme follows set lines. After a light-hearted introduction of the theme by an actor, there is a short documentary about a child at home and in the neighbourhood with family and friends. In *Waking up,* one can see how Youssef gets up, chooses his clothes, has breakfast and goes off to school with his friend Yasmine. The episode *After school* shows Chatera and Milad on their way to the sports club. In *Time for bed,* Sara sings a song with her mother before she goes to sleep.

Then we are back in the studio where the actor is talking to a small group of children about what it is like for them at home. Finally, he ends the episode by singing an appropriate song or telling a story.

Recommendations (also see section *A studio full of children* on page 29)

- Use an established framework for each episode.
- Choose everyday rituals.
- Include documentaries about the main character at home (with the parents also playing a role).
- End each episode with a song.

Improvements:

- The documentary about the sports club in *After school* does not provide enough material

for a lively exchange of experiences. In retrospect, we should have chosen *Visiting a friend in the hospital, Eating with a friend's family*, or one of the themes from the photograph books.

Puppet stories

In the manual, there are seven puppet stories which are performed with three hand puppets: Dodie and Dido and the fairy Serafina. Because the stories are about universal human emotions, we have chosen imaginary figures which are ethnically neutral. A sock doll, made from a brightly-coloured knee sock with two buttons for eyes and coloured ribbons for hair does not resemble any child at all, but every child can empathize with it.

During the play, the characters tell about their experiences with shyness, jealousy, arguments, playing together, teasing and broken promises. During the play, they invite the children to think with them about such questions as: how can you patch up an argument; what does it feel like when you are jealous; have you ever waited for someone who didn't come; what can you do about it when you get scared?

The puppets are not included in the kit, but they are easy to make. The simpler they are, the better, as long as they are sturdy: for they must become friends to the children who will be able to play with them themselves. After the play is over, the children talk about their own experiences. Because they also hear how others wish to be treated and what types of behaviour others have problems with, they can extend their behavioural repertoire.

The stories are most effective when they are simply played in the group and not in a puppet theatre. That way, it is clear to the children that the teacher also knows what has been said during the performance. When it is finished, the children talk about the feelings in the story and about their own experiences.

The three dolls remain in the classroom so that the children can re-tell the stories themselves. While they are playing with the puppets, they experiment with their own behaviour.

On a page copied from the kit, the children can make a drawing about the theme. They think up a short text which they, or the teacher, write down.

Recommendations:

- Use puppet-stories to stimulate discussions on feelings.
- Let the puppets ask children advice about how to handle the situation.
- Give the puppets their own corner in the classroom, where children can play with them.

Improvements:

- Include the puppets in the kit because not many of the teachers take the time to make them themselves.

The manual

The manual included with *This is me* begins with an introduction to the kit: points of departure; goals; and work methods. Under the heading *Experiences and tips*, one can find suggestions on handling diversity in the classroom using a couple of real-life situations which we have encountered in the schools. The pitfalls discussed evoke recognition from the teachers and make them more alert to the effects of their own behaviour.

The first chapter ends with a paragraph on the involvement of parents in the school, a few descriptions of schools where parent participation has got off to a good start and a series of pratical tips from those involved.

Who does Rydell look like?

In the mixed Group 1 and 2, the teacher shows the portrait photograph from the story Rydell goes to the barber. She asks the children: 'Who does he sort of look like?' Nobody reacts. The teacher continues: 'Does he look like Franklin?' Franklin is one of the three Creole boys in the group. Franklin is insulted: 'He doesn't look like me, at all!'

Photo: Madeleen Lazée

The teacher then moves the picture toward Ivan, another Creole boy. He turns away and shakes his head, no.

It seems as though this teacher is sorting by colour and the Creole boys find this undesirable because it does no justice to their individuality and to personal appearance.

Then there are chapters with ideas for lessons connected to the lap book stories, the look-and-listen stories, the video and the puppet stories. They follow established lines.

- A short description of the content.
  This makes it possible for the teacher to choose a story.

- Discussion after the story is read.
  Under this heading are suggestions for questions about the story: what children have noticed; what they like about the story; and what they think that the person in the story was feeling and thinking. Then a short play-acting assignment follows, on such things as: show how angry you can look; how you wake up in the morning; and how you gobble up delicious food. This play-acting constitutes the transition to talking about the children's own experiences. The teacher asks questions such as: does that happen to you sometimes; how does that work with you; what would you do; how do you make up after a fight?

  These short discussions work best when the teacher reads the story to a small group so that each of the children gets a chance to speak. Giving everyone in the group a short turn to tell something can compensate for the drawbacks of a large group. During his or her short turn, each child can give a brief answer to such questions as: 'what is your favourite food?' or 'who cuts your hair?'

- Dramatisation, pantomime and using the senses.
  Because of differences in language fluency, expressiveness, styles of learning and openness, the processing of information is never solely verbal. All the stories have incorporated ideas for short play assignments and activities in which the children can use their senses.

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Photo: Anne Frank Stichting

- Further suggestions.
  This section supplies ideas for further exploration of the theme, including the activity corners of the classroom (for example, the doll corner, the water corner, the dress-up corner, the building corner or the cooking corner).

- In conversation with the parents.
  In order to encourage the teachers to talk more often to the parents who keep their distance, every theme includes suggestions for short conversations about every-day subjects such as: has your child ever spent a night away from home; have you ever been to the children's farm here in the neighbourhood; your daughter says that she would sometimes like to go to the neighbourhood clubhouse, would you approve of that; can Joshua wear his favourite clothes to school tomorrow.

Sliding down the big slide

Siti Vina was proud when she got to the top of the climbing pole, says the teacher. Then she tells a story about herself: one day, when she was five years old, she could suddenly stand on her hands. She asks the children: have you ever been very proud of yourselves? What did you do? The children quickly name all sorts of achievements. I can do cartwheels, I baked an apple tart almost all by myself, I can ride a bike without training wheels. Then the teacher enquires if there is something difficult that they would like to try and if anyone can help them to do it. Sabine wants to slide down the very highest slide with her Papa, and Gilbert thinks that he dares pet the neighbour's dog if the neighbour holds onto it. The teacher asks Sander if he wants to try again with her to write his name, the day before it did not go too well and it made Sander angry. Now he nods in agreement.

In the puppet stories chapter, the complete stories are printed out, followed by a brief, one-page summary which the teachers can keep at hand and use to jog their memories during the performance of the puppet play.

The manual closes with an index in which the themes and the stories they appear in are listed. This way, the teachers can see at a glance which stories fit into a project on, for example, friendship, or which story they can read if a child in the class is going to sleep away from home for the first time.

Recommendations:

- Indicate pitfalls which inadvertently emphasise the fact that certain children are 'different'.
- Differentiate between the discussions about the story itself and about the children's own experiences.
- Include suggestions in every story for non-verbal activities and further handling of the theme.
- Include suggestions for the teachers' 'own' stories with the themes.

Improvements:

- Don't publish the manual as a separate book. Include with every story a 'successful' example of a short conversation with the parent instead of a series of suggestions.
- Divide the manual into short sections with only concrete practical pointers. Include the suggestion for lessons pertaining to the lap book stories directly after the story; create a short, general section with the aim and goals of the kit and an overview of the themes. The puppet stories could be bound together in a booklet, together with the suggestions for the teacher.

FROM IDEA TO PRODUCT: THE BACKGROUND

In this chapter we will discuss a few of the dilemmas and choices we came across during the developmental period.

Always just me

Individualism is often seen as 'typically Dutch'. This can conflict with the more group oriented tradition in other cultures. In *This is me*, the children as individuals are the focal point.

We chose this because the individual approach towards children is dominant in education. It will, therefore, affect every child. However, that in no way means that children from group oriented home cultures should turn against their group solidarity. At school they get the chance to become thoroughly acquainted with the dominant cultural style. They learn to extend their behavioural repertoire with social skills which will be helpful in the real world of the school and later in society. However, children must never feel that they must let go of something they consider to be personal.

The teacher is a person too

In an open exchange, all participants have something to add. It stimulates the others when the teachers also say personal things about the theme. They can, for example, start a discussion about getting up in the morning with how they themselves get up. Or, on the day that they talk about their favourite clothes in class, they can come to school in their favourite outfit. Teachers who talk about themselves become more of a person and easier to understand for the children in the class. That strengthens the connection with the children and loosens the tongues.

Finding the balance between stereotyping and whitewashing

In *This is me*, we aimed to show variation in ethnic-cultural and social backgrounds. We avoided the pitfall of ending up with a series of middle-class stories because the higher educated parents would be more likely to see the importance of such a kit. We therefore asked the authors to look for children from 'average' families. The cultural aspects are incorporated into the text and illustrations as they appear in reality, without emphasising or trivialising them.

When choosing the children, we made sure that the main characters do not confirm the existing stereotypes about their ethnic backgrounds. In practice, it sometimes proved to be difficult to determine the boundaries. The following two examples illustrate this.

The Moroccan author chose Mahassine as a main character. Her mother wears western clothes and brings Mahassine to school by bicycle. This is seldom seen in cities but, according to the author, is quite usual in villages.

Later, some of the teachers asked us why we had not chosen a mother and/or child with a head scarf, because these children have problems at school. They were only partially satisfied with our explanation that Mahassine is a figure to be identified with, even without the head scarf. A lesson about head scarves is precisely what does not fit into the concept of *This is me*.

Sometimes we wondered if we ourselves were confirming stereotypes. Could we use Tin when his parents have a Chinese restaurant? Other than that, he hardly conformed to the stereotyped image of Chinese children and it had been difficult enough to find a Chinese family who was prepared to work with us. Therefore, we simply accepted the fact of that restaurant.

Some of the teachers found the living rooms in the photographs and videos too neat. Normally, they would not look like that. It is, of course, possible, that the parents cleaned up their homes especially for the event, in spite of the fact that we asked them to keep everything as normal as possible. In any case, the photographs show the homes the way the parents would like them to be seen.

A world smoothed over?

Is *This is me* too idealistic? None of the characters have problems because of their ethnic backgrounds or skin colour while, in reality, that can happen, even in kindergarten. Earlier in the paper, we put forth the idea that young children do not yet consciously discriminate according to groups. *This is me* does not contain any examples of teasing based upon skin colour because it is precisely our aim to disassociate ethnic diversity from problems. The pivotal message is, especially when used by the 'white' classes, that colour is normal.

This is me provides starting points for discussions about skin colour, cultural differences and multilingualism. However, that only happens if the children themselves initiate this because the teachers do not focus on them. The stories create an opening for the exchange of thoughts and feelings, even on topics such as teasing and negative self-images. Subjects which would otherwise remain hidden now become discussable using concrete experiences. It helps to discuss how children can solve conflicts by themselves and set rules for interaction in the classroom like: do not tease each other; be willing to work together with everyone in the class; and take each other's feelings into account. If children, nonetheless, still make negative comments about each other or if they tease others because of their ethnic backgrounds, the teachers can then react by saying that they like the differences between children, or that they think a brown skin is beautiful. But first of all the teachers have to demonstrate in their behaviour that everyone is equally worthy.

How do you do that?

This is me provides handles for the development of general teaching skills, such as: giving children space; approaching each child with an attitude of appreciation and respect; and encouraging a positive atmosphere in the classroom. In such an atmosphere, the children will

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start to show more of themselves and will keep doing that because they enjoy the attention that they receive from their classmates and the teacher.

An open relationship towards all children demands that teachers are conscious of their own value judgements and expectations and, furthermore, that they exercise necessary caution so that these attributes do not determine their communication with children and parents.

Images concerning one's own and other cultures often appear when you least expect them. That is what a group of kindergarten teachers discovered during a course on working in an intercultural classroom. When the group leader asked them to bring something that they felt was typical of their culture, they could not think of anything. The members of the group (all were of Dutch origins) said to the group leader: 'It is easy for you, you are Surinamese!' They quickly, however, discovered the flaw in their reasoning. The following session they brought, among other things, an apple tart, a children's book, a Bible and a cheese knife.

Even when learning becomes a serious business …

In schools in the Netherlands, the teachers of four and five year old children work, in general, thematically. In Group 3, the six year olds learn to read, write and do arithmetic. The education then generally becomes more learning-oriented and more classical. This transition is rather abrupt for many children. We aimed *This is me* at Group 3 as well, in order to draw attention to the children as individuals and their social-emotional development. In practice, *This is me* is used fairly intensively in Group 3.

… and in white schools

The need for ethnically varied material is most urgent in a multi-ethnic group. Here the teachers experience the gap every day between the standard methodology and the experience of the children. Although, in general, most of the teachers also recognise the importance of intercultural education in 'white' schools, they show little enthusiasm for it. They are more interested in searching for materials that can be used for social-emotional development. We accentuate that aspect in presentations for schools with little ethnic variation.

To our satisfaction, half of the kits sold went to white schools.[16]

16 Cock R de (1997) *Pas op de plaats, een stap vooruit*. research report on *This is me*. internal publication, Anne Frank House, Amsterdam.

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FROM IDEA TO PRODUCT: GETTING STARTED

In the project outline we had a precise idea of what the final product should look like. Nonetheless, along the way we were confronted with various dilemmas and were often surprised by unexpected developments. In this chapter, we describe our approach and the hurdles we had to jump.

The photo stories: step by step

As soon as the ethnic groups had been determined, we searched for professional authors and photographers with the same ethnic backgrounds as the characters in the stories. We chose this combination because they could more easily create a bond with their subjects and were more readily trusted by the children and their parents. Moreover, in this way, the kit is not only about ethnic variation, it also offered the authors and photographers of non-Dutch backgrounds a chance to present themselves. They could have written in their own languages if they preferred, although none of them did so.

The disadvantage of this approach was that it required much more intensive guidance and support than would have been necessary if we had given the assignment to one author of children's books and one photographer both with Dutch backgrounds. It meant that we had to negotiate contracts with twenty candidates and try to get twelve creative people all working in the same direction.

Each of the authors looked for three possible characters through their own network. After obtaining permission from the parents, they interviewed the children using our list of themes and took their pictures. Using this information about the children's interests, character and everyday environment, we chose the children and the themes. Together with the authors, we decided upon the general content of the story. Then, in co-operation with the photographer, we translated this into seven scenes to be photographed. At this point, the photographers also met the families and scouted suitable locations.

Photographic model

The photo sessions took place in a single morning or afternoon, during which the author and one of the developers was present so that the text, photographic material and actual situation could influence and enrich each other. For every story, at least 60 slides were made so that we had a good choice when making our final selection.

In order to get the children used to the camera and to not inhibit their spontaneity, the photographer first shot a sample roll of film. The parents received an enlargement of a family photograph as a gift to thank them for their participation.

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Even though our point of departure was that the events in the story should be actual events, it was not possible to operate entirely without some staging. Sometimes this was because of the lighting within the house, the angle from which the playing children had to be photographed or because something went wrong the first time. The children regularly did something unexpected, which gave a new twist to the story: Taina got into an argument with her friends; and Jeroen got angry with his mother who punished him by putting him on the couch.

Too bad about the hospital

One photographic layout failed completely. The main character Arichelle had broken her arm. The photographer had taken pictures of how the cast was removed in the hospital. Arichelle found the whole situation scary and that could be seen on her face. At school she proudly showed the class the two halves of her cast.

Unfortunately, the slides were so dark that, in the end, we could not use this story. This was a shame for all those involved and also for the kit because it meant that the theme 'hospital' was no longer included.

The other setbacks were smaller. The aunt with whom Mahassine was going to spend the night cancelled at the last minute. However, the author was able to immediately arrange a make-shift solution. When shooting Tin's story, the photographer had to come back a second time because Tin's first babysitter, his grandmother, was too nervous on camera. She remained too distant, while the story was to culminate in her joy about the book Tin made by himself. Tin's other babysitter, Aunt Lan, took over the role two weeks later. A careful observer can see that Tin – between the two sessions – had his hair cut.

Editing

Each of the authors had his or her own style, and some were more professional than others. We explained to them beforehand that an experienced editor would read the stories. He sharpened the texts where necessary, made them more lively with dialogue and gave the personalities of the children more depth. Some of the authors found the intervention too drastic. The project team acted as intermediary between authors and editor and always, in the end, managed to bring all the parties involved into line. Because of his major influence on the final text, we decided to include the editor as co-author.

Saying 'yes'

Before publication, the authors, photographers and parents once again received the complete version of the text and the photographs for approval. They were asked whether or not the story fitted with the personality and the environment of the main character and if everyone approved of the way it had turned out. After a few minor adjustments here and there, everyone, including the parents, was proud and satisfied.

Recommendations:

- Make the environment of the child as realistic as possible.
- Work with authors and photographers from the same ethnic group as the main characters.
- Ask the authors to find, interview and describe the children.
- Set out the assignment for the authors and the photographers in a contract.

- Make sure to get written permission for publication from the parents beforehand.
- Have the photographer meet the child and his or her family before starting to take the pictures.
- Describe the story first in scenes; determine the definitive content only after the pictures have been taken.
- Have the photographers take at least 10 pictures per scene so that a large choice is possible.
- Work with an external editor.
- Show the finished photo-story to the author, the photographer and the parents one final time for approval.

Improvements:
- Be sure to tell the parents that the stories have to be as 'normal' as possible: so, for example, the living room can look a little messy.
- Ask the children (and their parents) to wear the clothes they feel most comfortable in.
- Determine beforehand that the editor will be included as co-author.

The video: a profession in itself

The production of the video *Look, This is me* was, in a certain sense, a gamble. We would rather have collaborated with Dutch Educational Television or the national Sesame Street team to make a few items about friendship among children with various ethnic backgrounds and about their daily lives. However, both television producers were booked solid for several years to come. We, therefore, decided to do it ourselves.

We had to deal with an entire team: a producer; a director; camera and sound technicians; and set designers. The preparations cost a great deal of time because they were relatively inexperienced in working with young children, especially from an intercultural perspective. During the preliminary meetings, we emphasised the atmosphere of the programmes, while the video specialists were more interested in the technical side, and wanted as little interference as possible during the recording sessions themselves. An audio-visual co-worker at the Anne Frank House helped us to create the scenarios and the set design.

A studio full of children

On the video, we show ethnic variation. Because we were also interested in showing language variation within the Netherlands, we looked for six children from different regions. We needed children who were nearly or just seven years old. One of the reasons for this is that children below seven years old are legally not allowed to take part in productions. Another reason is that the 'movie stars' had to be capable of taking direction, waiting for long periods on the set and repeating scenes if necessary.

In order to make the children feel at home, they were all invited to bring a friend to the set, preferably one with a different ethnic background than they had. Because the studio had to be leased for three consecutive days, the recording sessions took place during two school days so we also needed the permission of the school principal.

Working in the studio with 12 children was frankly nerve-wracking. Each episode had to be completed in one day; the sets were changed in the evenings. There was a great deal of pressure for everything to go right the first time.

Photo: Slothouwer Produkties

The days were long. The accompanying parents, brothers and sisters sat in a small room overlooking the studio, which resulted in a lot of waving. In spite of the tension, all the parents and children were satisfied when it was over. Every one of them was proud of the final results.

Talking, talking, talking

Kenneth Herdigein, a well-known Dutch actor of Surinamese descent, was willing to tape the themes' introductory and concluding scenes in the studio. He was also willing to hold short conversations with the children about the themes. We preferred not to have a teacher for this because the studio was not supposed to bear too much resemblance to a classroom. Kenneth understood exactly what we wanted. However, in the adverse environment of the studio, where waiting is the rule and taping the exception, it was difficult to get the children to talk. And, of course, they made the most wonderful remarks just after the microphone had been turned off or just when another child was yawning in boredom. A re-take was impossible: the children felt that once something was said, it was finished. Fortunately, the children loved Kenneth. He was one of the main reasons that they kept going until it was completed.

A smash hit

The first episode, *Waking up* closed with a song that became a smash hit. For our kit, a well-known singer-composer duo created a cheerful text about different types of hair. They incorporated Eastern rhythms into the music. During the taping, the studio children

combed their hair at the mirror while singing the song. The result was a flashy clip that children quickly pick up and sing along to.

In the living room

We filmed a documentary at the homes of three of the children. Here, the friends of the main character were also given roles. The video team recorded how Youssef got up in the morning, chose his clothes and had his breakfast; what Chatera and her little brother Milad do at their club; what rituals Sara has when she goes to bed. Because of the tension that the parents felt during the filming, it was not possible to portray a warm relationship between parent and child in the episode *After school.*

Fighting instead of friendship

During the documentary, the friends were interviewed about their (inter-ethnic) friendships. The interviewer asked them what they do together, what they like about each other, how they met, what the problems are and what they fight about. For a number of reasons, this section did not turn out well. *In After school,* Chatera's girl friend, Fatima, dropped out at the last minute. Her mother preferred that she go on a school field trip. Chatera's younger brother, Milad, took her place.

Sara and Joey, in the episode *Going to bed* chat easily about their friendship. They were 'stuck on each other' but Sara did not 'want' him anymore because he picked his nose. We felt that it would not be nice to Joey to include this story.

Finally, Youssef, the main character in *Waking up*, got into an argument with his friend, Yasmine. Fortunately, the director kept the camera rolling. From this tape, a penetrating scene has been created with two angry children. The atmosphere was tense. With a great deal of effort and an ice cream, the director was able to get Youssef and Yasmine laughing again. Without this happy ending, we would have left the scene out. However, when the teachers saw the preview, they said that it was a splendid introduction for starting a conversation about quarrelling.

Recommendations:

- Invite pairs of friends, preferably from different ethnic groups.
- Interview the main characters about their inter-ethnic friendship.
- Engage a presentator from the immigrant population who is experienced in holding open conversations with young children.
- Show different accents and dialects.
- Have the project team review all the video takes in search of valuable moments.

Improvements:

- Do not try to make the video yourself, but try to interest creators of school television or children's programmes in a series of portraits about children and produce this together.
- If it, nonetheless, turns into your own project, cooperate with media experts who are used to working with young children and who also have experience with intercultural programmes.

- Do the taping in a large studio with a separate area for the parents and a playroom for the children.
- Have the video team meet the children and the parents beforehand.
- Preferably tape the conversations about friendship in the studio.

Looking over our shoulders: the resonance group

In order to link to early childhood development, we compiled a resonance group with a specialist in developmentally-oriented pre-school education, a training instructor, a school councillor and an expert in the area of pre-school family programmes and parent participation. The group consisted of nine women – five of whom were members of ethnic minorities – who met four times.

We discussed the general concept, the purpose and the themes of the photo stories, the puppet stories and the video, the parent component and the implementation plan. The warning about creating too much of a middle-class atmosphere in the parent-child relationships and the suggestions for – among other things – the lessons and the conversations with the parents were useful, as was the support for the implementation of the project and the search for children for the stories and the video films.

Rita Swinnen, Programme Specialist at the Bernard van Leer Foundation, also followed the process of development with a great sense of involvement. Because of her international expertise, she was able to help us with her stimulating and discerning comments.

Recommendations:
- Present the concept and the material in the developmental stage to discerning interested third parties.

Going into the schools

During the spring of 1993, 15 teachers tested the photo and puppet stories in six schools, among which were a large inner-city school, a village school and four schools in middle-sized communities. Two schools had a majority of children from ethnic minorities, one had 50 per cent of their children from ethnic minorities, two schools had about 10 per cent of their children from ethnic minorities, and one school had no ethnic minorities.

The teachers worked with printed story texts and large prints of the photographs. We did not give the lessons ourselves because we knew exactly what we wanted to achieve with the material and, therefore, might have missed some pitfalls. In the classrooms we noted all the conversations as precisely as possible and discussed them with the teachers. We asked them what they noticed and what they would do differently. We also collected their suggestions on developing the theme through different activities.

The photo stories were a great success. The children enjoyed the photographs and listened with remarkable attention. They thought that it was funny that normal children like them were the centre of attention. One child said right away, 'I would like to have a book about me, too.'

Many of the children spontaneously talked about their own experiences, whether or not they identified with the ethnic background of the child in the story. A few of the stories turned out to be too complicated and had to be simplified.

The teachers said, repeatedly, that they had expected more information about the cultural backgrounds of the characters. When we explained again that our purpose was to free ourselves from the stereotyped manner of looking at the subjects and to present the children as individuals, most of the teachers agreed that this was a valuable point of departure.

On the wrong track

The first version of the stories had a portrait picture for the cover, while the text started with the second photograph. Apparently, that gave the teachers the idea of bringing up the children's ethnic and cultural characteristics. They asked such questions as: 'where do you think that this child comes from?'; 'this girl's name is Mahassine, don't you think that is a difficult name?'; 'is Nurdan different than we are?'

In order to emphasise that the main characters are individuals and not representatives of ethnic groups, we added a page of text to the portrait photograph with background information about the children: age; living situation; favourite games; friends; language background; and something about their school.

Recommendations:

- Test the lessons in schools with various ethnic compositions and living situations (rural/urban).
- Have the teachers do the lessons themselves while the project team observes.

Improvements:

- Look for at least one experimental school where the contact with the parents of ethnic minorities is better than average. If this school is prepared to share its experiences with colleagues at other schools, the name and telephone number of a 'contact teacher' can be included in the manual.
- Have the teachers also conduct the conversations with the parents. Describe a few of the positive experiences in the manual.

You weren't paying attention again?

We noticed that the teachers often interrupted a story in order to explain or ask about words. We believe that this can hinder the children in getting truly involved in the story. Therefore, in the final version, we explained a few of the 'difficult' but unavoidable words in the text of the story.

After reading the story aloud, many of the teachers asked questions intended to check whether or not the child had paid attention and had understood everything. However, anyone who is immersed in the story does not necessarily remember the facts. Questions aimed at reproducing the small details can spoil the listening pleasure. In the manual, therefore, we only include perceptive questions.

Recommendations:

- Explain unavoidable, but difficult, words within the text.
- Encourage the teachers to ask perceptive questions about the story.

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Finally, it's finished …

After more than two years, the kit was finally sent to press. In March 1995, the Under Secretary for Educational Affairs accepted the first copy during a festive presentation in the presence of nearly one hundred participants (including the children and their parents).

The Anne Frank House published the kit which is sold at cost price. A non-profit publisher, has taken the responsibility for handling the orders, while the House did its own marketing. Thanks to an extra subsidy from the Bernard van Leer Foundation, we were able to spend a year working on the marketing and implementation of the project. Our goal is to sell the entire edition within five years and, thereby, to reach 20 per cent of the elementary schools in the Netherlands.

From the bookshelf to the classroom

Together with the kit, we published a colourful 12 page brochure with an order form. We also put together, again with the support of the Bernard van Leer Foundation, the introduction video, *Aan het werk met 'Dit ben ik'*. On this 12 minute video, one can see how various stories are used in the classroom. The teachers tell what they liked about the kit. This tape is available through the Anne Frank House and is also subtitled in German *(An die Arbeit mit 'Das bin ich')* and English *(Get going with 'This is me')*.

In 1995, we sent a brochure and a press release to educational journals which placed announcements and/or included enthusiastic reviews. The editorial board of a government journal for education sent the brochure free of charge to all the schools.

On the road…
In the autumn of 1995, we organised eight regional information meetings for instructors at teacher training institutes and educational service centres. Because they are in direct contact with the schools, these organisations are in an excellent position to function as intermediaries. Eighty participants came and they were, in general, enthusiastic and were determined to bring *This is me* to the attention of colleagues and teachers. A number of organisations convened meetings on *This is me* themselves. We ourselves also gave workshops and presentations for teachers. *This is me* has also been included as an example in *Kleuren in de spiegel* (Colours in the mirror)[17] a teacher training module on 'intercultural teaching'.

… and across the borders
The concept also appeared to be an international success. At the moment, the Anne Frank House is co-operating with German, Danish and Luxembourger educators on an international version of *This is me* which will come out in 1999.

Using the experience that we gained in the developmental process, we will now make a number of different choices. The lap book stories and the look-and-listen books will form the basis of the kit, while the puppet stories will be translated. A new video will not be made as it is too expensive and labour intensive, and the children cannot work with the video themselves. We have found that teachers generally use an episode of the video only once a year, when it fits into the themes they are discussing.

17 Kramer M. (1996) *et al. Kleuren in de spiegel. Kennis en vaardigheden voor lesgeven in multi-etnische perspectief.* Assen.

Evaluation

In the autumn of 1996, a survey was held on the use and value of *This is me*[18]. From the list of orders, a random sample of schools were called and asked if they actually worked with *This is me* and if the teachers involved would be willing to take part in a written survey. The following became apparent from this quantitative investigation:

- About 18 months after publication, *This is me* was available in 5.7 per cent of the elementary schools but was not always yet being used.
- Training institutes for teachers and educational service centres have bought the kit in large numbers.
- The teachers questioned were extremely satisfied with the form and content of the kit.
- Parts of *This is me* are used, on average, in three classes per school.
- According to the teachers the kit works towards the goals, with the exception of involving the parents in the school. The suggestions for conversations with parents are hardly used.
- The lap book stories and the look-and-listen books are the most popular; the video and the puppet stories are used less often. Most of the teachers dread making the dolls themselves or are a bit apprehensive about doing puppet shows because they have never done them before.
- The users observed much involvement and input from the children.
- Most of the teachers used only the concrete suggestions from the manual; they are less interested in the theoretical background.

In order to reach more schools with less effort, we are looking into the possibility of putting the sales into the hands of a large educational publishing house. The disadvantage of this is that the price of the kit will have to be cut because sales representatives charge a 20 per cent commission.

Qualitative investigation

The researcher also researched how teachers worked with the material. She attended lessons on *This is me* at five schools and noticed that the teachers, in opposition to the purpose of the kit, tended to stress the ethnic backgrounds of the main characters.

In spite of the fact that background information about the children is incorporated into the story, situations occurred like the one described below when Rydell's story was presented.

Teacher:	'Who does Rydell look like? Like Jacinta, don't you think?' (Jacinta has a Surinamese background)
Student:	'And like Amber!' (Amber is Indonesian)
Teacher:	'No, not like Amber.'
Student:	'Yes, he does.'
Teacher:	'Rydell has different hair, doesn't he?'
A few children:	'Yes.'
Teacher:	'What do you call hair like that?'
The children do not know.	
Teacher:	'Kinky hair!'

18 Cock R de (1997) *Pas op de plaats, een stap vooruit*, research report on *This is me*, internal publication, Anne Frank House, Amsterdam

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It is obvious that, in order to influence the attitudes of the teachers, more must be done than a manual or a single workshop can accomplish.

Recommendations:

- About 18 months after publication, inquire into the sales and use.
- Involve teacher training institutes and educational service centres in the implementation.

Improvements:

- Instead of (short) workshops, offer seminars in which teachers can actually practice with the materials and methods.
- Before starting the project, find interested organisations which can support the training of teachers.
- Submit the publication to a publisher of educational materials or put the sales in the hands of sales people who visit the schools as representatives of the publishing houses.

INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION IN THE CLASSROOM

As we heard the results of the qualitative evaluation, we felt the need to concentrate on influencing the attitudes of the teachers, whether or not these attitudes are coupled to the use of intercultural material. We were therefore very pleased that, in 1997, the government project group, Intercultural Education, gave us the assignment to develop – in co-operation with teachers – a broader concept for dealing with diversity. Together with 13 teachers at different schools, we are searching for points of departure in the lessons that would help them establish a more open atmosphere in the classroom. The pivotal point is the identity of the teacher and the children and the restructuring of (unspoken) conflicts in dialogue. We made a collection of ideas for lessons that were successful for the teachers within the network. By exchanging ideas, they were able to inspire each other. By consciously choosing a personal approach, the teachers extended their own teaching repertoire and became conscious of their own attitudes towards diversity. They developed their skills in order to be able to take into account the differences among children in their classroom organisation and to adjust, accordingly, the lesson plans, the educational content, the various ways of working, the communication in the classroom and the counselling of children.

We have used our experience in this network of teachers to create a course which will be offered to schools in 1999 via Educational Guidance Centres. With this course, we will be able to work in a more focused manner on the attitudes and skills of the teachers than would have been possible using only good material.

Lessons learnt

The development of *This is me* was an adventure for us and for all those involved. What stimulated us was the complete lack of bias with which children in the class absorbed the photo stories and videos – they showed how open they are to the world of others. They only brought up the ethnic backgrounds of the children in the stories if they recognised something and wanted to go into it. It is for young children that the society's ethnic-cultural diversity should be reflected in learning materials – without that diversity being automatically linked to problems.

However, it was more difficult than we had anticipated to get the teachers to downplay ethnic diversity. Though they approved and supported the ideas behind the kit, they still did not put them into practice in the classroom. We therefore now often speak about ethnic diversity in terms of 'doing right by differences', alongside dealing with themes such as gender and social class differences in the classroom. Everyone sees the importance of this.

During the development process, many of our ideas were confirmed: every character has a story that is worth talking about. Better still, every child has a story that is worth talking about. The creation of a wide ranging kit such as *This is me* requires much time and money. But there is a simpler way. Hopefully, teachers will use the idea from the manual to make books with the children about themselves. This is why we called this publication *This is me: in search of your own story*. The wish of the child who said 'Miss, I would like a book like this about me too' can easily be fulfilled. With a simple camera, a theme and a script of every child, the classroom library can be full of exciting moments in the lives of the children. Children will read these books because every child is curious about the daily lives of their peers.

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The Bernard van Leer Foundation is a private foundation created in 1949 and based in the Netherlands which concentrates its resources on early childhood development. The Foundation's income is derived from the bequest of Bernard van Leer, a Dutch industrialist and philanthropist (1883-1958) whose industrial and consumer packaging company, the Royal Packaging Industries Van Leer NV, currently operates in over 40 countries worldwide.

The Foundation accomplishes its objective through two interconnected strategies:

1. an international grant-making programme in selected countries aimed at developing contextually appropriate approaches to early childhood care and development; and
2. the sharing of knowledge and know-how in the domain of early childhood development that primarily draws on the experiences generated by the projects that the Foundation supports, with the aim of informing and influencing policy and practice.

A leaflet giving fuller details of the Foundation and its grant-making policy and a Publications and Videos List are available at the address given below.

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Working Papers in Early Childhood Development form a series of background documents drawn from field experience that presents relevant findings and reflections on 'work in progress'. The series therefore acts primarily as a forum for the exchange of ideas.

The papers arise directly out of field work, evaluations and training experiences. Some of these are from the world wide programme supported by the Bernard van Leer Foundation. All the papers are aimed at addressing issues relating to the field of early childhood care and development.

The findings, interpretations, conclusions, and views expressed in this series are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Bernard van Leer Foundation.

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Contributions

The Foundation solicits contributions to this series. They should be drawn from field experience and be a maximum of 15,000 words. Contributions can be addressed to Joanna Bouma, Department of Programme Documentation and Communication at the address given below.

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